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Ukulele Lessons Helping Law Students Reduce Stress

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Ukulele Lessons Helping Law Students Reduce Stress

Ukuleles have tiptoed into Duquesne's School of Law for a four-week pilot program that has already shown to help students reduce stress and anxiety while providing time to socialize with their peers.

The Power of Music, a Student Bar Association program in collaboration with the Mary Pappert School of Music, offers hour-long lunchtime sessions during which Duquesne law students learn to play the ukulele together.

As coordinator of student organizations in the law school, Robin Connors has worked closely with law students to understand their stress and anxiety, especially around final exam time. "In the past, I've brought in therapy dogs, hired a masseuse to do chair massages and put out healthy snacks and food during exam time," she said. "My goal was to think of something we could continuously offer as a musical outlet to help reduce their stress and anxiety over the long term."

Connors, who has been playing the ukulele for nearly two years with the Steel City Ukuleles, said she's experienced the benefits, including decreasing her stress while working full-time and earning a master's degree. "Playing the ukulele has reduced my stress for sure, but I also noticed the other benefits of increased concentration, creativity and reduced anxiety," she said.

After meeting with the Student Bar Association, Connors reached out to the Mary Pappert School of Music and was invited to attend a faculty meeting to ask for

assistance in developing a program involving music to help law students. Dr. Rachel Whitcomb, Associate Music Education Professor, contacted Connors, and the two agreed to collaborate and design the ukulele pilot program.

"We recently incorporated ukulele into our methods classes for undergraduate music education students at Duquesne, so it was a great fit," says Whitcomb. "Ukulele is becoming more and more popular in our society and in our public schools for many reasons. It is an accompaniment instrument, which allows people to sing and play simultaneously."

The 12 students have already learned contemporary songs like Jason Mraz's *I'm Yours* and Taylor Swift's *Shake it Off* as well as classics like *Margaritaville*, *You Are My Sunshine* and *Skip to My Lou*.

Ukulele has worked well with the law students because it's easy to learn and the pilot program is just a few weeks long, according to Whitcomb. "I wanted the students to feel that they were completely immersed in music as soon as possible," Whitcomb explained. "The ukulele allows for that. It is a low stress instrument, which ties into the whole motivation for creating the program."

Connors said the students are enjoying the lessons and feedback has been very positive. "One student was so excited about the program that he went out and bought a ukulele before we had the first session," she said. ■

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